

Message Text

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E.O. 11"52: N/A

TAGS: PINT IC

SUBJECT: ALLEGATIONS OF COVERUP AGAINST PROGRESSIVE PARTY CHIEF

1. MAJOR POLITICAL FUROR HAS ERUPTED OVER JOURNALISTS'S CHARGE THAT PROGRESSIVE PARTY CHAIRMAN OLAFUR JOHANNESSON HINDERED IMPORTANT CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS IN HIS CAPACITY AS JUSTICE MINISTER. IN ARTICLE THAT APPEARED JANUARY 30 IN INDEPENDENCE PARTY-AFFILIATED VISIT, JOHANNESSON IS ACCUSED OF HAVING HALTED OR SLOWED DOWN INVESTIGATIONS INTO LARGE-SCALE LIQUOR SMUGGLING AND TAX EVASION CASE WHICH HAS BEEN LINKED TO DISAPPEARANCE AND PRESUMED MURDER OF TWO MEN. MOTIVATION FOR JOHANNESSON'S ALLEGED INTERFERENCE STEMS FROM REPORTED TIES BETWEEN SMUGGLING RING AND FINANCIAL BACKERS OF PROGRESSIVE PARTY. AUTHOR OF ACCUSING ARTICLE IS VILMUNDUR GYLFASON, MEMBER OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND SON OF EX-SDP CHAIRMAN GYLFI GISLASON, MP.

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2. JOHANNESSON HAS HOTLY DENIED CHARGES. IN FEBRUARY 1 OPEN-LINE

RADIO PROGRAM HE ATTACKED "VISIR MAFIA" FOR BRINGING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST HIM. FOLLOWING DAY MATTER WAS RAISED IN ALTHING BEFORE PACKED PUBLIC GALLERY WHEN SDP MEMBER SIGHVATUR BJORGVINSSON RENEWED AND ELABORATED ON ORIGINAL ACCUSATIONS AGAINST JUSTICE MINISTER. JOHANNESSON, REPORTEDLY SHAKING WITH ANGER, AGAIN REFUTED CHARGES. HE DISMISSED GYLFASON AND BJORGVINSSON FOR THEIR ROLES IN MATTER AND INSTEAD LASHED OUT AT UNNAMED PERSONS BEHIND VISIR AS BEING RESPONSIBLE. HE WENT ON TO NOTE THAT VISIR IS ORGAN OF IP, WHICH IS COALITION PARTNER OF PROGRESSIVES. "STAB IN BACK IS TERM FOR THIS," HE ADDED.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH ORIGINAL ARTICLE BY GYLFASON, WHO IS SELF-STYLED INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER, OSTENSIBLY REFLECTS ONLY HIS OWN VIEWS, JOHANNESSON HAS SEEN FIT TO CONSTRUE CHARGES AS COMING FROM VISIR AND, INDIRECTLY, FROM CIRCLES INSIDE INDEPENDENCE PARTY. FRAGILE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COALITION PARTIES IS ALREADY SUFFERING SOME STRAINS AS RESULT OF DIFFERING APPROACHES TO FISHERIES DISPUTE WITH UK, WITH JOHANNESSON PERSONALLY LEADING HARD-LINERS AGAINST IP INCLINATION TO COMPROMISE. HIS PUBLIC BITTERNESS OVER ALLEGED "STAB IN BACK" FROM IP CAN HARDLY HELP BUT AGGRAVATE SITUATION. (AS INDICATION OF ITS SERIOUSNESS, THIS PARTICULAR REMAKR WAS OMITTED FROM OTHERWISE EXHAUSTIVE COVERAGE OF JOHANNESSON'S ALTHING STATEMENT IN MAJOR DAILIES OF BOTH IP AND PP.)
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